

## CHAPTER XXVII.

"A Tracker to John Dorr." Sir GALLON awoke, sat down and looked about her, trying to remember what had happened and where she was.

There came back to her the voice of that in Russia, the assault on the hotel and their own subsequent flight.

Around her the natives lay in posture of sleep. Not far away, within arm's reach, John Dorr was still unconscious of the new day.

Again sat Sir Donald, rise on his knees, bowed in darkness after his night's vigil.

She called over to Faversham, and he raised himself, apparently much embarrassed that he had been seen watching over the slumbers of his companion.

A moment later the whole camp was up and breakfast was soon digested. "Now for a council of war," the baronet said presently. "So far we have made good our escape from the fastness, and I believe now it would be wise to turn back and seek civilization again for the sake of Miss Ruth."

"Oh, I am good for my amount of this kind of travel," she exclaimed. "And I am willing to go ahead and find the old and the plains."

"So far as we know, there is Shala," Faversham remarked, with some brusqueness. "I don't intend that you shall risk your life again in such foolishness."

John Dorr had steadily grown more and more suspicious of the Englishman's attitude, and he now bitterly resented his assumption of guardianship over Ruth, the more so that he realized Faversham had restricted her once from a tangle of his making and was undoubtedly right when he proposed that she be placed in safety.

His first impulse was to insist that Ruth follow his plans, but second thought told him that he would be playing an unworthy part.

"Where shall we take her?" he demanded.

"Back down the river to some city where there are Americans," was the response. "Romey would be best of all."

"But that would leave me as I am," Ruth protested. "I know John will insist on keeping after the plains, and I don't want to be left out of everything."

John Dorr joined Sir Donald in agreeing that there was little sense in going up a wild prairie chase and that she would be better off with good people of her own race.

"But what?" she demanded of her. "You don't know any one."

"I know some awfully jolly Americans, too, mischievous. Then there's that American consul you know."

It was settled at last, and they returned to seek refuge in Shala and Shala down the river.

Sir Donald was as good as his word, and Ruth found herself invited to stay at a smattering of several houses.

She chose that of the American consul, a middle-aged gentleman, who, with his wife, presided with true western hospitality over a little group of business men and missionaries.

Mrs. Reynolds received the girl with open arms, listened to the story of her

hostess," Ruth answered. Every hour may be precious. I must see Sir Donald immediately."

To his surprise, Faversham was very cold about the second excursion.

"So long as it was a case of getting Miss Gallon and yourself out of a bad scrape I did my best," he told Dorr. "But I agree with your cross-investigation fellow—that what you propose is ridiculous. The priests have ample warning, and I am informed that they took measures to secrete the ideal. You can gain nothing by further search."

John argued with some tenacity, but Sir Donald was immovable.

And, as he more evidently had sound human sense on his side, Dorr could not afford to lose his temper.

"I suppose you'll help me out by letting me have that old servant of yours," he said finally.

"Anything?" said Faversham curiously. "But I never certainly warn

her, with bitterness in his soul, but the firm resolve to carry out his self-appointed task no matter what the outcome.

Faversham was as good as his word and the old native agreed once more to risk the hills and guard this strange woman, he was convinced, had lost his mind.

But his duty was plain and Sir Donald's instructions not to be trifled with. That evening the two of them set forth following in the track of Wilkerson who, he was convinced, had lost his mind.

That John should have departed without further farewell hurt Ruth severely.

It seemed to mark a definite break in their frank relations, and she felt that when he returned with the plane he would have to receive him on an entirely new footing—the footing of a business man with his employer.

And while the hurt was fresh she turned to Sir Donald gratefully. He had acted most gallantly in all their experiences together. He had proved his devotion by coming with them to India and during the terrible nightmare when their boat had been the center of assault by fanatical natives.

He had accepted her promise without undue exacting. He had seemed to be waiting till he and she could speak more definitely.

Faversham was by no means dull, and he played the part of a kind friend during the best days of John's absence.

He knew that Dorr was in love with Ruth and he strongly suspected that her feeling for him had once bordered on love.

He would bear upon no old wounds. He was devoted, cheerful always at her call, but never insistent on his services.

The American counsel freed him from the rest and told his wife that Ruth would be a fool if she preferred a half-baked idiot to a solid gentleman with no nonsense about him and assured optimism in work.

Mrs. Reynolds, having been rebuffed when she sought Ruth's confidence, merely stated it as her opinion that all girls were alike, a dogma the young wife was wise to argue.

But he gave Sir Donald the freedom of the counsels and saw to it that he had every chance to talk with Ruth.

Now, the baronet was not only no fool, but he had been bred to a school that forbade him to anger his master.

"Wilkeson," he gasped.

"You're it's me," was the snarling response. "What are you doing here?"

"Some Indians took us for enemies and chased us pretty much all day long," Dorr explained. "We saw this hut, and when it was dark enough to conceal our movements we made for it."

"And now you can make for some other place," Wilkerson said, brandishing his revolver menacingly.

"I feel myself that the place is too small for both of us. But it's white man against Native now. If they get me they'll get you. Our only hope is to stick together now."

"I'll see you dead first," snarled the other.

But Drake spoke up and silenced him.

"While you two are fighting for the benefit of the servants those Indians are preparing to assassinate the baron."

"A big look through a crack showed the Indians closing up about them, and Wilkerson gave in with a bad grace.

He was out of the hole, however, when the firing grew hotter and they were hard pressed in the hole.

The natives proved themselves anxious towards, and it depended on the three whites to defend the place.

This they did with such success that they assistants slowly withdrew.

"Now is the time for a sortie," said Dorr. "We're not to drive them clean away from here or else we'll be badly off as ever."

Otherwise the idiot would undoubtedly run into once more into trouble.

Wilkerson himself was having a difficult time of it. The man with him were almost openly rebellious, and at

however, he warned John over and over again that the Indians had round certain fanatical tribes to a place where they would ask few questions of wondering Europeans, but seek instant vengeance.

"They're old grannies," was John's disrespectful comment. "Ruth, you know that without these plans we're helpless to make 'The Master Key' map your father wanted it to be. I set out to get those plans, and I've not come this far to turn back."

"I know," she said uncertainly. "But everybody says it is all foolishness. Mr. Donald."

"One that quitter," he interrupted. "I know he prefers sitting around making love to you to doing something really worth while."

There was the gleam of a smile on Ruth's lips as she answered mockingly. "Then you don't think that writing around—and making love to me—is worth while?"

For a moment John stood and stared at her. The blood crept into his face. Then the full meaning of his light exclamation of his real meaning struck him like a blow between the eyes.

His heart was filled with rage for her, a rage that had grown and increased since the time when he had first seen her at old Tom's cabin a door.

He had thought that his devoted service to her interests, his constant attention to the slightest detail that might insure her future happiness, would have justified his love to her.

He was intended to fit her now, to force all else in order to win her for himself.

"Ruth," he began. But some subtle change in her manner froze the hot words on his lips.

"Well," he went on, controlling himself with a tremendous effort and trying to speak firmly. "I'll be off. Thank God your plans and risk your own life. Miss Gallon stays here."

"And I'm sure there is no place I'd rather leave her," Dorr said gratefully.

He continued to consider briefly that he was still determined to find the old and get the hidden plans.

"You may be too late," was the quiet response. "A man named Wilkerson and another man and a lady have already gone up country, and I am informed that they are on the same quest."

"All the more reason why I should

"bring me good luck and all Tom Gallon had luck," was the response. "Do you think I don't want to keep it? It's my master."

Faversham was as good as his word and the old native agreed once more to risk the hills and guard this strange woman, he was convinced, had lost his mind.

But his duty was plain and Sir Donald's instructions not to be trifled with. That evening the two of them set forth following in the track of Wilkerson who, he was convinced, had lost his mind.

Here they were confronted with a new difficulty. None of them men had been allowed to know of the presence of the old, and Drake asserted that to inform them now would be dangerous to his party.

That John should have departed without further farewell hurt Ruth severely.

It seemed unwise merely to drop in to the village, as it might escape notice, and no good would be done.

It never be delivered to the priests and the community made that the white men should be allowed safe conduct on the way.

How to do this occupied their minds until the day when they found them selves suddenly attacked to force and had to take refuge in a gully but.

Here their position was so perilous that they had no time for anything but preparations for defense.

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

## The Snare in the Image.

**T**HIS mean business this time," Drake growled as they did their best to barricade the single door and window. "I tell you those huts are full of them."

"And our own bullets aren't up tight with good grace, either," Wilkerson snarled. "These hair white horses are no good."

"It's an odd thing," Drake said when the afternoon had passed without an assault, "that we never fire, but none of it is directed at us."

"That's so," Wilkerson responded thoughtfully. "I wonder who it can be?"

He was soon to know, for after nightfall John Dorr and his single attendant rode furiously up to the hut and tried to enter.

A few scattering shots told that they had been discovered in their flight.

For the moment Wilkerson did not recognize his old enemy, disguised as he was in native costume, but when he was sure he reluctantly opened the door and admitted him.

John singed himself inside and jammed the door to just as a second hand of bullets rattled on its surface. Then he stared at the man opposite him.

"Wilkeson," he gasped.

"You're it's me," was the snarling response. "What are you doing here?"

"Some Indians took us for enemies and chased us pretty much all day long," Dorr explained. "We saw this hut, and when it was dark enough to conceal our movements we made for it."

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change in her manner froze the hot words on his lips.

When the hut was completely quiet except for the breathing of the sleeping Drake allowed himself to fall into a deep reverie.

Now that the quest was practically over he had begun to think about his own part in it and reckon on his reward.

Long association with Wilkerson had shown him that he had nothing to expect from him unless by an appeal to his sensibilities.

There was but one person who might reward him—the woman they both loved, Jean Dorr.

His mind went back to his first days of acquaintance with her in New York.

He peered around the hut and, finding all asleep, he set the lid of his box and bent over it.

He pulled at the eve which he had seen Wilkerson draw out. It came with difficulty. Then he held it up and looked into the dark office. There was nothing there.

He was about to throw the lid down in disgust when a glimmer of something bright within the box caught his attention.

He stepped over again and then frantically into the room. The spirit god was moving within.

The point of light grew into intense brightness. It approached the dark eye socket and glowed therein with bright fire.

Drake's whole body quivered with excitement.

He peered around the hut and, finding all quiet outward